WHAT IF™

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WHAT IF™ CONAN® THE BARBARIAN WALKED THE EARTH TODAY?

AT LAST!! THE MOST-REQUESTED, LONGEST-AWAITED, AND MOST CONTROVERSIAL TALE EVER, OF THE WORLD'S MOST SAVAGE HERO!!

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STAN LEE PRESENTS: A STUNNING SAGA OF AN ALTERNATE REALITY!

WHAT IF CONAN THE BARBARIAN WALKED THE EARTH TODAY?

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"BETWEEN THE SINKING OF ATLANTIS AND THE RISE OF RECORDED HISTORY LIES THE FABLED HYBORIAN AGE--

"YET, THOSE WHO FOUGHT AGAINST THE WILD-VISAGED BARBARIAN IN THIS LONG-AGO TIME MIGHT BE MORE INCLINED TO CALL IT THE AGE OF CONAN...

"...THOSE, THAT IS, WHO SURVIVED THE FIERCE ONSLAUGHT OF HIS FLAME-LIKE FURY.
"THERE WERE NOT MANY OF THEM.

YET, WHAT IF THE REDOUBTABLE CIMMERIAN HAD LIVED AND FOUGHT IN ANOTHER EON, SUCH AS YOUR OWN?
A LUDICROUS QUESTION... ONE IMPOSSIBLE OF AN ANSWER?
PERHAPS... AND PERHAPS NOT.

FOR, SUCH A THING *NEARLY* HAPPENED ONCE... THOUGH, IN YOUR *OWN* TIME CONTINUUM, NEITHER HE NOR ANY OTHER *KNEW* IT.

SUCH ARE THE *PARADOXES* OF THE ROAD NOT TAKEN... THE OPPORTUNITY MISSED... THE TRAGEDY, PERHAPS, AVOIDED.

I ALONE KNOW HOW CONAN CAME WITHIN A *HAIR'S BREADTH* OF THE WORLD OF *MODERN MAN*... OF NUCLEAR NIGHTMARE AND FASHIONABLE NEUROSIS.

I KNOW... FOR, I AM THE *WATCHER*.

NO, THIS TALE DID NOT TRULY "*HAPPEN*," AS YOU UNDERSTAND THE TERM— UNLESS IT BE IN THAT *TWILIGHT UNIVERSE* WHICH IS EVER RESERVED FOR THE WORLD OF *WHAT-IF*... OF *MIGHT-HAVE-BEEN* BUT *WASN'T-QUITE*.

YET, IN THE END, *ALL* LIVING CREATURES DWELL IN THAT WORLD... YES, EVEN *I*...

CONAN OF CIMMERIA MERELY CAME *CLOSER* THAN MOST MORTALS TO *REALIZING* FULLY HOW *GOSSAMER-THIN* IS THE LINE WHICH SEPARATES *SPACE* AND *TIME*...

"IT WAS SOME TIME AFTER CONAN BECAME *WAR-CHIEF* OF THE FIERCE, DESERT-DWELLING *ZUAGIRS*... AND, WITH THEIR AID, HAD RESCUED THE *QUEEN OF KHAJARAN* FROM THE CLUTCHES OF HER SORCEROUS *SISTER*...

"... THAT HE RODE, UNANNOUNCED AND UNKNOWN, THROUGH THE GATES OF THE TRADE-CITY CALLED *AKBITANA* *

*AS SEEN IN THE FIFTH AND SEVENTH ISSUES OF OUR $1 COMPANION MAGAZINE, *THE SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN*...ROY.

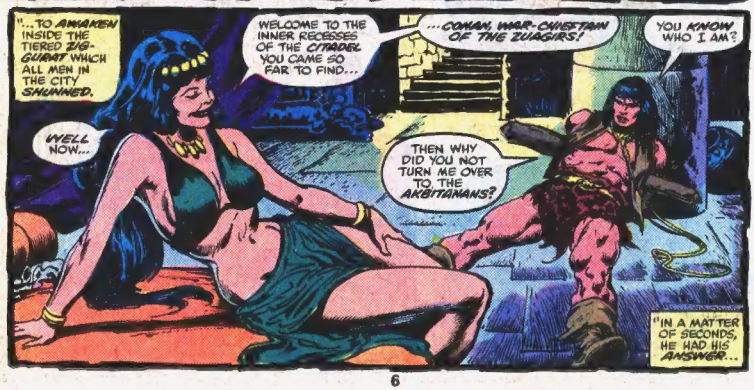
CONTINUED AFTER NEXT PAGE

"HE WAS ON A SPYING MISSION... YET, AS EVER, HE TOOK TIME TO TASTE THE WILES OF A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN.
CROM TAKE ME, ALHAMBRA, I'VE SEEN FEW WHO DANCE AS WELL AS YOU SINCE I LEFT THE FLESH-POTS OF ZAMORA.

"BUT, THE TRAIL HAD BEEN LONG AND HARD... AND HE GREW CARELESS...
I THANK YOU, SIR.
WHY DON'T YOU DRINK UP-- AND WE'LL TALK FURTHER OUT OF THE TORCH'S GLARE!

"THUS, WHEN HE DRANK DEEP...
HARD...TO THINK...
HARDER STILL...TO STAND...!
"MOMENTS LATER, HE WAS NOT STANDING AT ALL...

"...BUT BEING CARRIED INSIDE A THICK CARPET, THROUGH AKBITANA'S NIGHT-DESERTED STREETS...


"...TO AWAKEN INSIDE THE TIERED ZIGGURAT WHICH ALL MEN IN THE CITY SHUNNED.
WELCOME TO THE INNER RECESSES OF THE CITADEL YOU CAME SO FAR TO FIND...
WELL NOW...
...CONAN, WAR-CHIEFTAIN OF THE ZUAGIRS!
YOU KNOW WHO I AM?
THEN WHY DID YOU NOT TURN ME OVER TO THE AKBITANANS?
"IN A MATTER OF SECONDS, HE HAD HIS ANSWER...

"...IN THE PERSON OF ONE SHAMASH SHUM-UKIN!"

I--I DID NOT KNOW YOU HAD RISEN FROM YOUR MEDITATIONS, MY LORD.

THE STARS ARE RIGHT, GIRL.

YOU'VE BROUGHT THIS STURDY SPECIMEN AT A PROPITIOUS MOMENT...

...FOR SHAMASH SHUM-UKIN, WHO ONCE WAS KING IN THICK-WALLED BABYLON.

BABYLON? I NEVER HEARD OF SUCH A PLACE.

THE ANSWER IS YES... AND NO.

IS IT PERHAPS OVER TOWARD TURAN?

I HAVE BEHELD MANY THINGS, BARBARIAN...

"THEN, THE MAN FROM THE FUTURE TOLD OF THE WONDERS OF TIME HE HAD GLIMPSED...

"...SPOKE OF CITIES OF SHIMMERING GLASS... OF FLYING GALLEYS THAT FILLED THE HEAVENS...

"...AND OF CHARIOTS WHICH DEPENDED ON NEITHER HORSES NOR OXEN TO DRAW THEM.

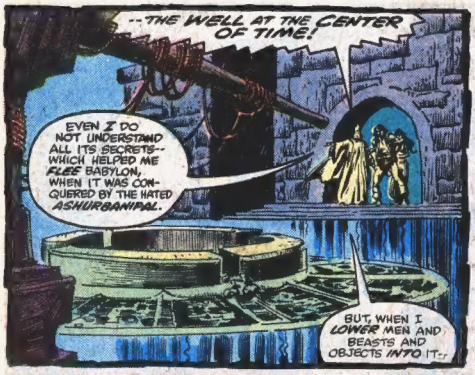
"CONAN, OF COURSE, COULD ONLY CREATE HIS OWN MENTAL IMAGES FROM THE WORD-PICTURES OF THE BABYLONIAN TIME-TRAVELER.

"AT LAST, HE BEGAN TO COMPREHEND JUST A LITTLE...

THEN, SOMEHOW, YOU AND THIS CITADEL OF YOURS ARE FROM-- ANOTHER AGE! BUT NOW--?

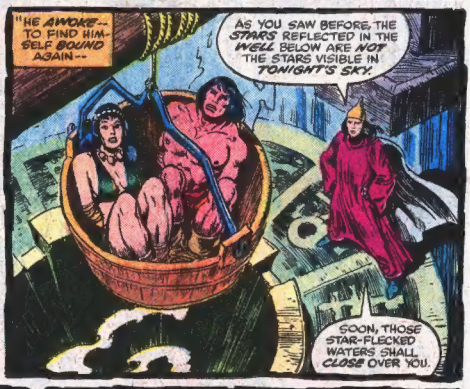
THAT YOU SHALL SOON LEARN AND BE SORRY THAT YOU DID!

COME, MY FRIEND, AND WITNESS--


--THE WELL AT THE CENTER OF TIME!
EVEN I DO NOT UNDERSTAND ALL ITS SECRETS--WHICH HELPED ME FLEE BABYLON, WHEN IT WAS CONQUERED BY THE HATED ASHURBANIPAL.
BUT, WHEN I LOWER MEN AND BEASTS AND OBJECTS INTO IT--

--I OFTEN DRAW FORTH OTHER, MORE VALUABLE THINGS--FROM TIMES OUT OF MIND, BOTH PAST AND FUTURE--AS IF IN EXCHANGE.
THE DEVIL WE WILL, MADMAN!
YOU--AND THE GIRL ALHAMBRA--SHALL BE MY NEXT ITEMS OF TRADE!

"CONAN BROKE FREE--ONLY TO BE FELLED ANEW--
ARRR
"--BY AN AXE WIELDED BY ONE OF SHAMASH'S STONE-AGE MINIONS.


"HE AWOKE--TO FIND HIMSELF BOUND AGAIN--
AS YOU SAW BEFORE, THE STARS REFLECTED IN THE WELL BELOW ARE NOT THE STARS VISIBLE IN TONIGHT'S SKY.
SOON, THOSE STAR-FLECKED WATERS SHALL CLOSE OVER YOU.

SHORTLY THEREAFTER, I'LL DRAW THE RECEPTACLE UP AGAIN--
--TO SEE WHAT THE UNSEEN POWERS HAVE GIVEN ME IN TRADE!
"AT THE PULLING OF A LEVER, CONAN AND THE GIRL STARTED THEIR DOWNWARD WAY..

CONAN! DO SOMETHING! YOU'VE GOT TO!
"...AS THE WEIRDLING VAPORS FROM THE EERIE WATERS BELOW GREW THICKER... THICKER ABOUT THEM.
"THE CIMMERIAN, HOWEVER, SCARCELY HEARD HER.

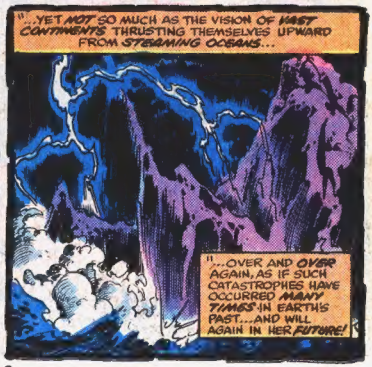
"FOR, THE THICK FUMES RISING FROM THE STAR-POOL HAVE MADE HIM SEE THINGS IN THE MIRROR OF HIS MIND!

"THE SINKING OF ATLANTIS, LONG MILLENNIA BEFORE, DURING WHAT NEMEDIAN SCHOLARS CALLED THE GREAT CATACLYSM...

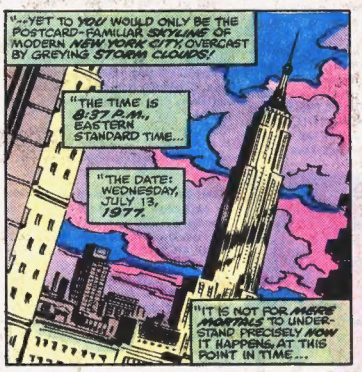
"THEN, THE IMAGES FLASHED FORWARD-- TO A LAND MUCH LIKE SERPENT-INFESTED STYGIA--
"--BUT WHICH HE SOMEHOW KNEW LAY RATHER IN HIS OWN FUTURE.

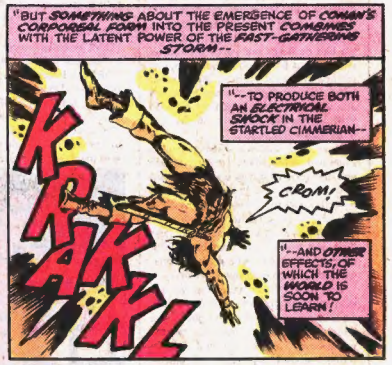
"NEXT, ANOTHER BACKWARD LEAP-- TO BEHOLD HUGE, HAIRY BEASTS SUCH AS HE'D ONCE SEEN IN A LOST VALLEY SOMEWHERE IN CORINTHIA--
"--FIGHTING MEN AS BESTIAL AS ANY HE HAD EVER KNOWN.

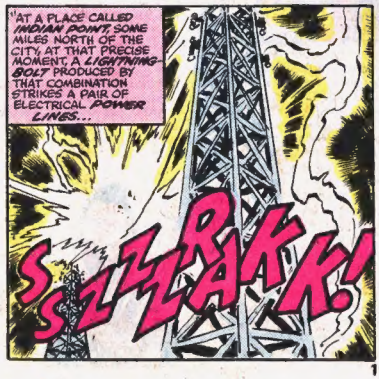
"THE ENSUING SCENE, HE SENSED, LAY EVEN FURTHER BACK IN TIME'S ABYSS-- BEFORE ANYTHING HUMAN EXISTED UPON HIS WORLD'S GREEN BREAST.
"THE IMAGES STAGGERED HIS BARBAROUS MIND...


"...YET NOT SO MUCH AS THE VISION OF VAST CONTINENTS THRUSTING THEMSELVES UPWARD FROM STEAMING OCEANS...
"...OVER AND OVER AGAIN, AS IF SUCH CATASTROPHES HAVE OCCURRED MANY TIMES IN EARTH'S PAST...AND WILL AGAIN IN HER FUTURE!

"HE SAW HIS MIND-PICTURES OF SHAMAN-SHUM-SHUM'S PAST, ALSO--BUT THEY TOLD HIM LITTLE HE CARED ABOUT KNOWING.
"IT WAS OTHER THINGS THAT INTERESTED HIM NOW...
"...SUCH AS THE FACT THAT THE POOL-VAPORS HAD SOMEHOW MADE THE ROPES WHICH BOUND HIM CLEAN...
"...AND WEAKER!
"THEY DID NOT HAVE TO BE TOO WEAK.
OH, FREE ME TOO, CONAN--PLEASE--!
I OUGHT TO TOSS YOU IN...
SO HANG ON--
--AND PRAY TO ISHTAR I DON'T CHANGE MY MIND BEFORE WE REACH THE TOP!
NOW, WHERE'S THAT WIZARD WHO USED TO BE A KING...?
"BUT HERE THE TIME-LINES DIVERGE...
"AND WHAT YOU KNOW AS CONAN'S PAST BECOMES HIS ALL-TOO-REAL PRESENT...
"...BECAUSE OF ONE MORE ROTTED, AGED ROPE!
CROM!
"THE BLACK WELL OF STARS BELOW BECKONS HIM LIKE EYES OF A WOMAN OF ZAMORA...
"...DARK, ILLUSIVE, SINISTER!







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"ON THE ISLAND CALLED *MANHATTAN*, SOME DISTANCE TO THE SOUTH, RESIDENTS ARE AS YET *UNAFFECTED* BY THIS ELEMENTAL PHENOMENON, AS ELECTRICAL LIGHTS AND TV SETS DO NO MORE THAN *FLICKER* MOMENTARILY.

"YET, IN A PLACE CALLED *GREENWICH VILLAGE*...IN THE SHADOW OF THE *GREAT ARCH* AT ONE END OF WASHINGTON SQUARE PARK... *HISTORY* OF A SORT IS BEING MADE ALREADY TONIGHT...

MOTHER OF MITRA!

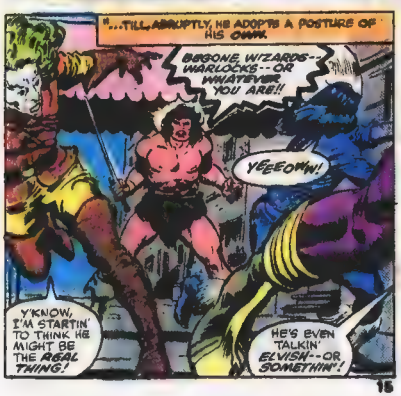
"...AS *CONAN OF CIMMERIA* IS THRUST DOWN, *QUICKLY, BOLDLY* AND SQUARELY INTO A *HOT AND HUMID NIGHT* IN THE LATTER PART OF THE *TWENTIETH CENTURY!*

"QUICKLY, CONAN STALKS HIS WAY TO AN ALL-BUT-DESERTED SIDE STREET.
"THIS WORLD IS STILL A MYSTERY TO HIM, AND HE WISHES TO REMAIN INCONSPICUOUS UNTIL HE GETS HIS BEARINGS.

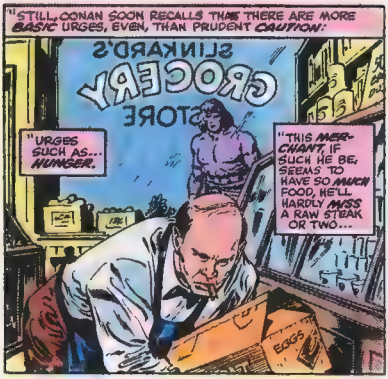
"THE PLAN DOES NOT, ALAS, WORK.
...AND THAT'S THE LAST GIG WE'RE PLAYIN' IN THIS DUMP, TILL WE GET A--
WELL-NOW--!
TONIGHT, THE NEW ROCK SCENE GROVE!

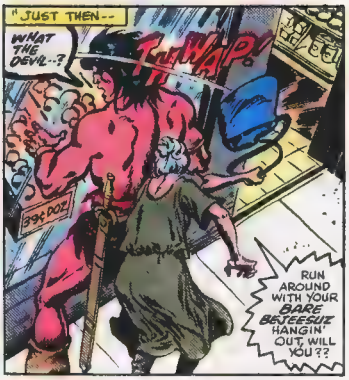
WHO'RE YOU, MAN? AND WHAT'RE YOU DOIN' IN THAT SARGASSUM-TYPE GET-UP?
HEY, MAYBE HIS MOTHER WAS FRIGHTENED BY A FRANK FRAZETTA POSTER BEFORE HE WAS BORN!
"CONAN, OF COURSE, STILL UNDERSTANDS NOT ONE WHIT OF WHAT THE PUNK-ROCK MUSICIANS ARE SAYING...

"BUT, EACH MOMENT, HE CARES LESS AND LESS FOR THEIR POSTURING ATTITUDES...
WAITAMINNIT, YOU GUYS! MAYBE HE'S A ROCKER--SOME SCOAB THEY'RE RINGIN' IN TO REPLACE US!
YEAW? WELL, WAIT'LL I GIVE 'IM MY OLD DOUBLE-NEX WHAMMY SMILE! THAT OUGHTTA--

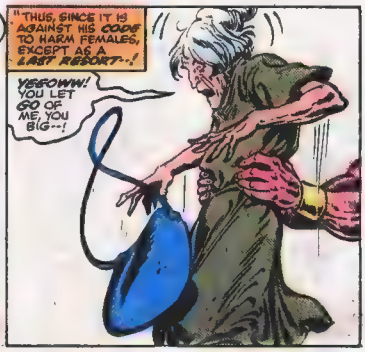

"...TILL, ABRUPTLY, HE ADOPTS A POSTURE OF HIS OWN.
BEGONE, WIZARDS--WARLOCKS--OR WHATEVER YOU ARE!!
YEEEOWN!
Y'KNOW, I'M STARTIN' TO THINK HE MIGHT BE THE REAL THING!
HE'S EVEN TALKIN' ELVISH--OR SOMETHIN'!

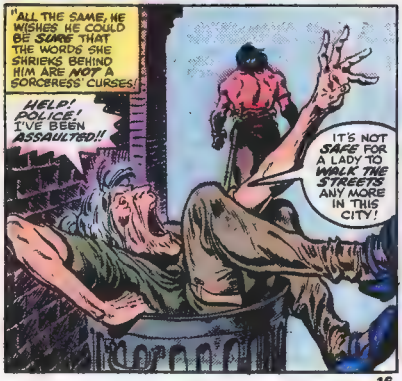
"THOUGH SEEING NOW THAT THE COSTUMED CAVORTERS WERE MADMEN, HE STILL CAN BE GLAD FOR THE FICKLE FATE WHICH, IN THIS PARALLEL WORLD, LED SMASHASH SHAWN OWEN TO LEAVE HIM HIS SMOKER.
"IN A WORLD OF MADMEN, ONE MUST GO ABOUT ARMED

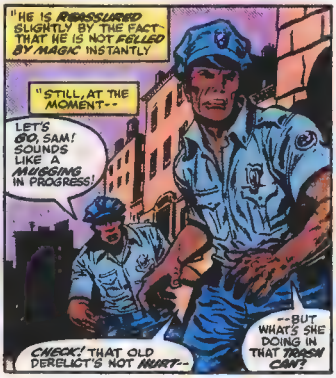

"STILL, CONAN SOON RECALLS THAT THERE ARE MORE BASIC URGES, EVEN, THAN PRUDENT CAUTION:
SLINKARD'S GROCERY STORE
"URGES SUCH AS... HUNGER.
"THIS MERCHANT, IF SUCH HE BE, SEEMS TO HAVE SO MUCH FOOD, HE'LL HARDLY MISS A RAW STEAK OR TWO...
EGGS

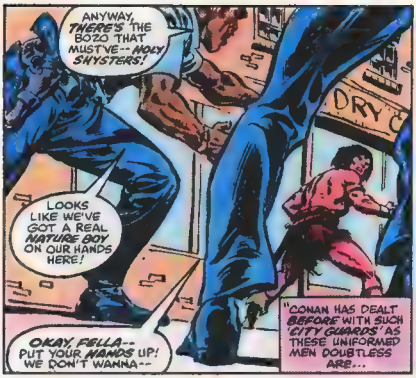

"JUST THEN--
WHAT THE DEVIL--?
THWAP!
29¢ DOZ
RUN AROUND WITH YOUR BARE BEFEEFUZ HANGIN' OUT, WILL YOU??

?HMMFF!- JUST BECAUSE THAT "ROCKY" MOVIE OF YERS MADE ALL THAT MONEY, YOU THINK YOU CAN PARADE AROUND IN FRONT OF DECENT FOLKS...!
"IS THIS WITHERED CRONE WHO STRUCK HIM A WITCH, HE WONDERS GRIMLY--OR ONLY AN OLD WOMAN, AS TOUCHED IN THE HEAD AS SHE SEEMS?
"HE CANNOT BE CERTAIN.


"THUS, SINCE IT IS AGAINST HIS CODE TO HARM FEMALES, EXCEPT AS A LAST RESORT--!
YEROWN! YOU LET GO OF ME, YOU BIG--!


"ALL THE SAME, HE WISHES HE COULD BE SURE THAT THE WORDS SHE SHRIEKS BEHIND HIM ARE NOT A SORCERESS' CURSES.
HELP! POLICE! I'VE BEEN ASSAULTED!!
IT'S NOT SAFE FOR A LADY TO WALK THE STREETS ANY MORE IN THIS CITY!


"HE IS REASSURED SLIGHTLY BY THE FACT THAT HE IS NOT FELLED BY MAGIC INSTANTLY
"STILL, AT THE MOMENT--
LET'S GO, SAM! SOUNDS LIKE A MUGGING IN PROGRESS!
CHECK! THAT OLD DERELICT'S NOT HURT--
--BUT WHAT'S SHE DOING IN THAT TRASH CAN?


ANYWAY, THERE'S THE BOZO THAT MUST'VE--MOLY SHYSTERS!
LOOKS LIKE WE'VE GOT A REAL NATURE BOY ON OUR HANDS HERE!
OKAY, FELLA-- PUT YOUR HANDS UP! WE DON'T WANNA--
"CONAN HAS DEALT BEFORE WITH SUCH 'CITY GUARDS' AS THESE UNIFORMED MEN DOUBTLESS ARE...
DRY C

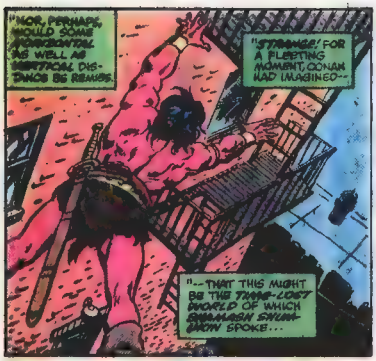
"NOR, IS HE USED TO ONES AS RELUCTANT TO DRAW THEIR WEAPONS AS MOST MANHATTAN POLICEMEN.
"THUS, HIS PRECAUTIONARY MEASURE OF DRAWING HIS SWORD IS, PERHAPS FORGIVABLE IN OUR ENLIGHTENED EYES...
STAY BACK, DOGS!
"...IF NOT NECESSARILY TO THOSE OF NEW YORK'S FINEST.

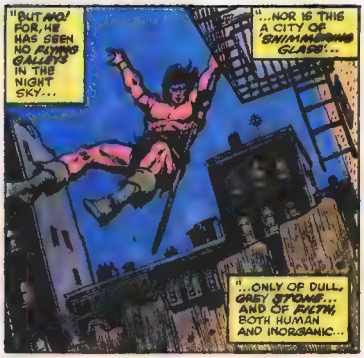
"WHILE, NEARBY,
PETE! THOSE BOYS-IN-BLUE ARE CHASING SOMEBODY! YOU WANT TO--?
IT'S NONE OF OUR BUSINESS, MARY JANE. I'D BETTER TAKE YOU HOME.
IF IT'S ANYTHING REALLY SERIOUS, I CAN COME BACK LATER AS SPIDER-MAN!

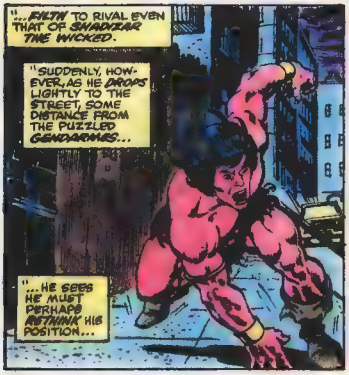
"THE SPECIAL POWERS OF THE YOUNG HUMAN ARACHNID, HOWEVER, WILL NOT BE NEEDED...
HALT--OR YOU'LL FORCE ME TO FIRE!
HE DOESN'T SEEM TO UNDERSTAND ENGLISH ANY BETTER THAN HE SPEAKS IT.
MAYBE A WARNING SHOT WILL BRING HIM TO HIS SENSES...!

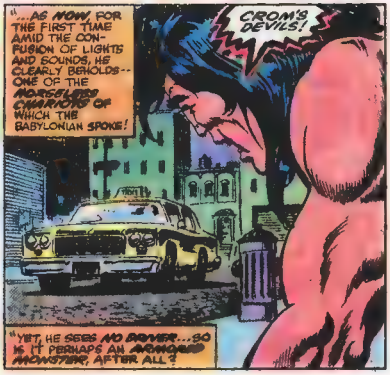
"INDEED, IN OUR TIME, BULLETS UNFORTUNATELY DO SPEAK A UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE.
"BUT, TO ONE FROM 120 CENTURIES AGO...
BLAM!
"...THE SINGLE FLASH OF THUNDEROUS FIRE FOLLOWED BY A SPLATTERING OF BRACK MEANS--
MAGIC!

"AND, IN A PLACE WHERE CALLOW YOUTHS GO DRESSED LIKE WIZARDS, AND WHERE EVEN THE CITY GUARDS EMPLOY SORCERY OF A SORT--
STOP HIM!
NO USE! HE'S SCALING THAT WALL LIKE HE WAS KING KONG!
"--THE BEST PLACE FOR A SWORD-WIELDING CIMMERIAN IS THE HIGHEST POINT AROUND!


"NOR, PERHAPS, WOULD SOME HORIZONTAL AS WELL AS VERTICAL DISTANCE BE REMISS.
"STRANGE! FOR A FLEETING MOMENT, CONAN HAD IMAGINED--
"--THAT THIS MIGHT BE THE TIME-LOST WORLD OF WHICH SHAMASH SHUR-UKKU SPOKE...

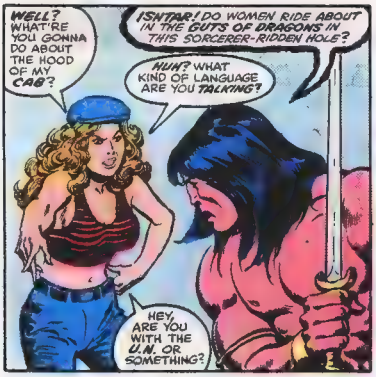

"BUT NO! FOR, HE HAS SEEN NO FLYING GALLEYS IN THE NIGHT SKY...
"...NOR IS THIS A CITY OF SHIMMERING GLARE...
"...ONLY OF DULL, GREY STONE... AND OF FILTH, BOTH HUMAN AND INORGANIC...

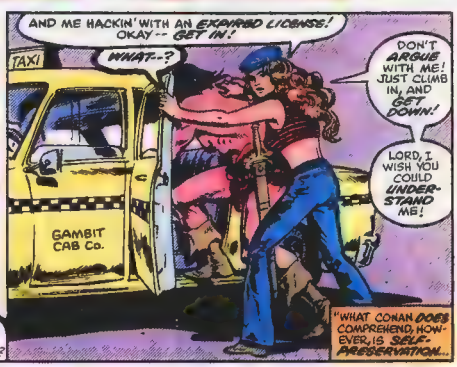

"...FILTH TO RIVAL EVEN THAT OF SHADIZAR THE WICKED.
"SUDDENLY, HOWEVER, AS HE DROPS LIGHTLY TO THE STREET, SOME DISTANCE FROM THE PUZZLED GENDARMES...
"...HE SEES HE MUST PERHAPS RETHINK HIS POSITION...

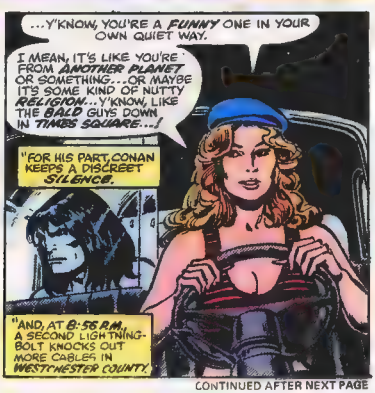

"...AS NOW, FOR THE FIRST TIME AMID THE CONFUSION OF LIGHTS AND SOUNDS, HE CLEARLY BEHOLDS-- ONE OF THE MORTALOID CHARIOTS OF WHICH THE BABYLONIAN SPOKE!
CROM'S DEVILS!
"YET, HE SEES NO DRIVER...SO IS IT PERHAPS AN ANCIENT MONSTER, AFTER ALL?

"HE KNOWS ONLY ONE WAY TO FIND OUT...!
DIE, YOU DEMON FROM THE PIT--
THWANG!

DIE-- IF DIE YOU CAN!
HEY, YOU!!
I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOUR BEEF IS-- BUT STOP CHOPPING UP MY HACK, WILL YOU?!
I'M A WORKING GIRL!
FWA







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"ONLY NOW DOES HE BEGIN TO SENSE THAT HE MUST HAVE TRAVELLED EITHER FORWARD OR BACKWARD IN TIME; SOMEHOW, AS A RESULT OF FALLING INTO SHAMASH SHUM-UKIN'S BOTTOMLESS WELL...

LISTEN, I DON'T MEAN TO BE FORWARD, BUT DID WE MAYBE MEET AT ETC.--

YOU KNOW--EAGLEHART TRAINING CENTER?

NO, I GUESS NOT.

"YET, IF THIS IS EARTH'S FUTURE, THEN IT SEEMS TO CONAN THAT IT PLAYS HAVOC WITH THE THEORIES OF PROGRESS HE HAS HEARD ESPOUSED BY THE SCHOLARS OF NEMEDIA...

I DON'T KNOW WHERE TO LET YOU OFF, SO MAYBE I'D BETTER TAKE YOU TO MY PLACE FIRST.

EVEN MY OLD NEIGHBORHOOD IN BROOKLYN'S BETTER THAN HAVING YOU ROAM THE STREETS.

YOU MIGHT HURT SOMEBODY WITH THAT THING--

--OR POIN'T IT AT A COP, Y'KNOW?

YOU TALK QUI'TE A LOT, DON'T YOU, GIRL?

YOU SEEM FRIENDLY--BUT IF YOU TURN OUT TO BE SOME EVIL SORCERESS, CASTING A SPELL ON ME--!

"MEANWHILE, DURING CONAN'S TAXI-RIDE, THE HOUR OF 9 P.M. HAS COME AND GONE...

"AND, IN A PLACE CALLED PLEASANT VALLEY, STILL A THIRD POWER LINE HAS BEEN STRUCK BY LIGHTNING--

ZZZZTT!

"-- IN WHAT A SPOKESMAN OF CONSOLIDATED EDISON WILL CALL...AN ACT OF GOD.

I LIVE OVER THIS FURNITURE STORE; THE SWEET OLD GUY WHO RUNS IT'S GONE ON VACATION.

GOOD THING! IF HE SAW YOU, HE'D HAVE A STROKE!

"IT IS NOW 9:27 P.M...

INCREDIBLE! WE'VE CUT THE OVERLOADED LILCO SYSTEM FREE--

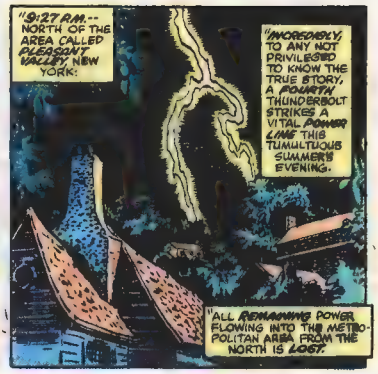
--AND NOW STILL MORE LIGHTNING JUST STRUCK UP IN WESTCHESTER!

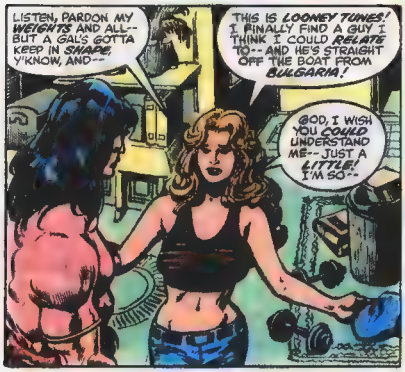
THE BIG ALLIS GENERATOR'S DOWN!

NEW JERSEY'S CUT ITSELF FREE--!

WHAT'S NEXT?

C'MON UP, AND I'LL BREW YOU SOME--
OH, STOW THE SINGLES-BAR DIALECT, DANETTE!
IT'S OBVIOUSLY CASTING SWINE BEFORE PEARLS.


"9:27 A.M.-- NORTH OF THE AREA CALLED PLEASANT VALLEY, NEW YORK:
"INCREDIBLY, TO ANY NOT PRIVILEGED TO KNOW THE TRUE STORY, A FOURTH THUNDERBOLT STRIKES A VITAL POWER LINE THIS TUMULTUOUS SUMMER'S EVENING.
"ALL REMAINING POWER FLOWING INTO THE METROPOLITAN AREA FROM THE NORTH IS LOST.

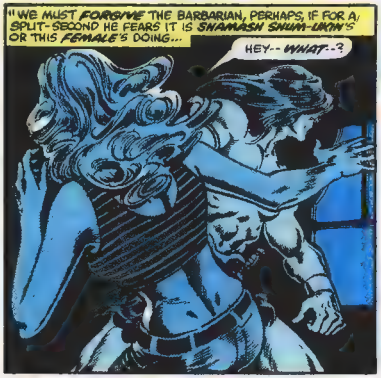

LISTEN, PARDON MY WEIGHTS AND ALL-- BUT A GAL'S GOTTA KEEP IN SHAPE, Y'KNOW, AND--
THIS IS LOONEY TUNES! I FINALLY FIND A GUY I THINK I COULD RELATE TO-- AND HE'S STRAIGHT OFF THE BOAT FROM BULGARIA!
GOD, I WISH YOU COULD UNDERSTAND ME-- JUST A LITTLE! I'M SO--

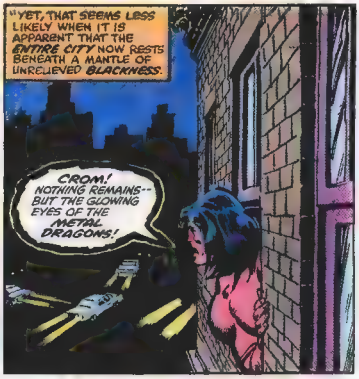
"THEN, FOR PROBABLY THE FIRST TIME IN YEARS... AT LEAST IN FRONT OF ANOTHER PERSON... THIS ATTRACTIVE MORTAL CRIES...
"AND THAT, THE GIANT CIMMERIAN DOES COMPREHEND...

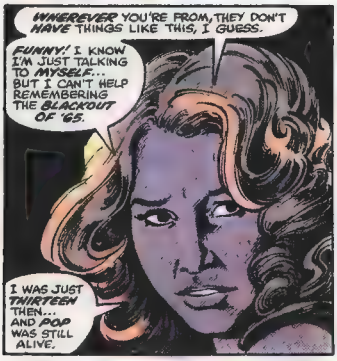
"...AT LEAST, IN HIS OWN WAY:
YOU'RE ALONE HERE-- IN THIS MAD, MONSTROUS WORLD-- WITH NO MAN TO PROTECT YOU.
BUT, YOU'VE BEEN KIND TO ME... I THINK.

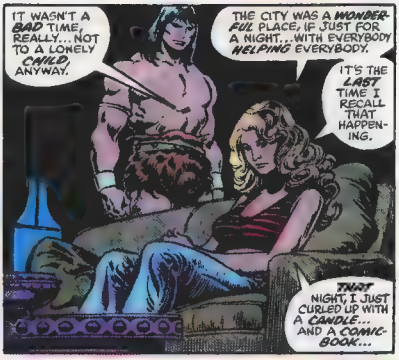
I'LL PROTECT YOU, IF YOU'RE TRULY WHAT YOU--
"KISSES, LIKE BULLETS AND TEARS, SPEAK A TONGUE THAT NEEDS NO TRANSLATING.

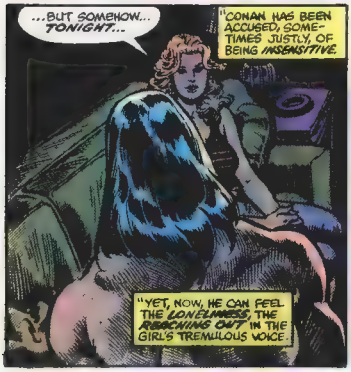
"BUT THE TIME IS NOW 9:36 P.M...
WHAT IN MITRA'S NAME--?
THE LIGHTS!!

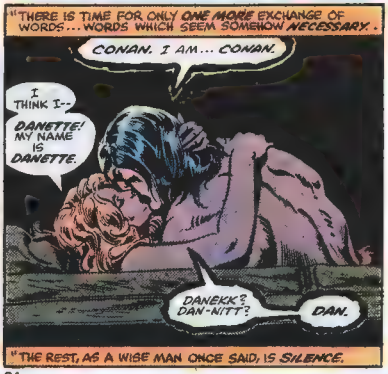

"WE MUST FORGIVE THE BARBARIAN, PERHAPS; IF FOR A SPLIT-SECOND HE FEARS IT IS SHAMASH SHUM-UKIN'S OR THIS FEMALE'S DOING...
HEY-- WHAT--?


"YET, THAT SEEMS LESS LIKELY WHEN IT IS APPARENT THAT THE ENTIRE CITY NOW RESTS BENEATH A MANTLE OF UNRELIEVED BLACKNESS.
CROM! NOTHING REMAINS-- BUT THE GLOWING EYES OF THE METAL DRAGONS!


WHEREVER YOU'RE FROM, THEY DON'T HAVE THINGS LIKE THIS, I GUESS.
FUNNY! I KNOW I'M JUST TALKING TO MYSELF... BUT I CAN'T HELP REMEMBERING THE BLACKOUT OF '65.
I WAS JUST THIRTEEN THEN... AND POP WAS STILL ALIVE.


IT WASN'T A BAD TIME, REALLY... NOT TO A LONELY CHILD, ANYWAY.
THE CITY WAS A WONDERFUL PLACE, IF JUST FOR A NIGHT... WITH EVERYBODY HELPING EVERYBODY.
IT'S THE LAST TIME I RECALL THAT HAPPENING.
THAT NIGHT, I JUST CURLED UP WITH A CANDLE... AND A COMIC-BOOK...


...BUT SOMEHOW... TONIGHT...
"CONAN HAS BEEN ACCUSED, SOMETIMES JUSTLY, OF BEING INSENSITIVE.
"YET, NOW, HE CAN FEEL THE LONELINESS, THE ASKING OUT IN THE GIRL'S TREMULOUS VOICE.


"THERE IS TIME FOR ONLY ONE MORE EXCHANGE OF WORDS... WORDS WHICH SEEM SOMEHOW NECESSARY.
CONAN. I AM... CONAN.
I THINK I--
DANETTE! MY NAME IS DANETTE.
DANEKK? DAN-NITT?
DAN.
"THE REST, AS A WISE MAN ONCE SAID, IS SILENCE.

"AT FIRST, MORTALS REFUSE TO *ACCEPT* THE FACT THAT A *TOTAL FAILURE* OF ELECTRICAL POWER HAS OCCURRED FOR A SECOND TIME IN TWELVE YEARS:

"*BROADWAY ACTORS* PERFORM UNDER THE WAVERING BEAMS OF *FLASHLIGHTS* HELD BY CONFUSED STAGEHANDS...

"*WAITERS* SERVE PATRONS BY *CANDLE-LIGHT*... AND SOME OF THE MORE *ROMANTIC* OF THE LATTER DO NOT MIND AT ALL..

"EVEN THE *MAYOR* JOKES AT FIRST ABOUT PEOPLE NOT PAYING THEIR *ELECTRICITY BILLS*... BEFORE HE BEGINS TO SEARCH ABOUT FOR A HANDY *SCAPEGOAT*.

"IN SHORT, *MOST* CITY-DWELLERS EXPECT A REPETITION OF THE RELATIVELY *PEACEFUL* EVENTS OF THE BLACKOUT A DOZEN YEARS *EARLIER*...

"BUT, IT IS *NOT* TO BE

BLAM! KRAK! CRASH!

CROM! WHAT THE *DEVIL*--?

MMMM..?

OH, HELLO...

...CONAN...

IS IT *MORNING* ALREA--?

SLAM

SMASH!

WHAT'S THAT *SOUND*-- COMING FROM RIGHT *UNDER* US-- THE *FURNITURE STORE*?

"THE GIRL'S *WORRIED TONE* ROUSES THE CIMMERIAN'S *PROTECTIVE* INSTINCTS ANEW...

"AND, WITHIN MOMENTS, NOT KNOWING WHAT PERILS MAY *AWAIT* HIM BELOW, HE SETS OFF BY AN *INDIRECT* ROUTE ..

HEY! WAIT FOR *ME!*

"*ANOTHER* MOMENT-- AND HE *KNOWS*.

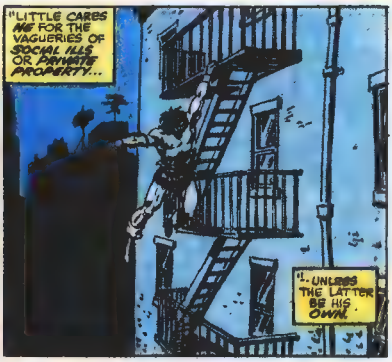
WHAT *IS* IT?

LET *ME*--

CHRISTOPHER

"IN EVERY AGE, IN EVERY CLIME, THEY EXIST--
"--READY TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF ANY BREAKDOWN OF SOCIAL ORDER...OFTEN IN THE NAME OF DUBIOUS MOVEMENTS FOR REAL OR IMAGINED OPPRESSION.
OVER HERE, MAN!
IT'S CHRISTMAS IN JULY!
YOU KNOW IT, BUDDY!
"LOOTERS!

"FROM TIME TO TIME, CONAN HIMSELF HAS JOINED SUCH LAWLESS RAT-PACKS.
WAIT! I'LL BE RIGHT--


"LITTLE CARES HE FOR THE VAGUERIES OF SOCIAL ILLS OR PRIVATE PROPERTY...
"..UNLESS THE LATTER BE HIS OWN.

"TONIGHT, HOWEVER, HE IS ON THE OTHER SIDE.

"THE STORE BELOW, FOR ALL HE KNOWS, MAY BELONG TO THE RED-TRESSED WENCH...

"AND MORE: A HOWLING, LOOTING MOB MAY EASILY TURN INTO A KILLING MOB.

"UNLESS, THAT IS, IT IS *HE* WHO BEGINS THE SLAYING...!
HEY! WHO THE HELL'S *THAT*??
LOOKS TO *ME* LIKE SOME CAT THINKS HE'S *TARZAN!*
OUT, DOGS-- BEFORE I GIVE YOU A TASTE OF *GOOD HYBORANIAN STEEL!*
MOVE IT, LAMONT! THAT MAMA'S *CRAZY*, AN' HE'S GOT HIM A *BIG KNIFE!*
CRUD! MAYBE WE SHOULD'A ROBBED LIS A *GUN SHOP* INSTEAD!
"BUT THEN, BEFORE CONAN CAN *MOVE* TOWARD THE STARTLED LOOTERS--

CONAN--NO! OH, GOD, I HOPE YOU CAN *UNDERSTAND* ME!
NO! DON'T *KILL* THEM!
EH?

I...UNDERSTAND YOUR WORDS..."YES"!, AND "NO."
FOR SOME REASON, YOU *DON'T* WANT THESE DOGS *SLAIN!*

I'LL THROW THEM OUT *GENTLY*, IF I CAN-- FOR *YOUR* SAKE.
ALL RIGHT, DAN...
NUH--?
LEGGO!

LISSEN, DUDE-- MAYBE YOU'RE HOT SPIT DOWN AT THE LOCAL "Y"!-- BUT THEM BICEPS AN' TRICEPS DON'T CUT NO ICE WITH *ME!*
AND, TALKIN' ABOUT *CUTTIN'*--!

"RESTRAINED ONLY BY THE YOUNG WOMAN'S WORDS, CONAN *TURNS* THE GLEAMING BLADE AWAY-- AS EASILY AS AN ORDINARY MAN MIGHT TURN A *BOOK-KNOB*..
OWWWWW--!
H-HEY, MAN-- YOU JUST 'BOUT BROKE MY *WRIST!*

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"THAT ACHING WRIST, AS IT HAPPENS, IS VERY NEARLY THE LEAST OF THE LOOTER'S PROBLEMS...
L-LEMME GO, MAN-- P-PLEASE!!
I-- I DIDN'T MEAN TA--

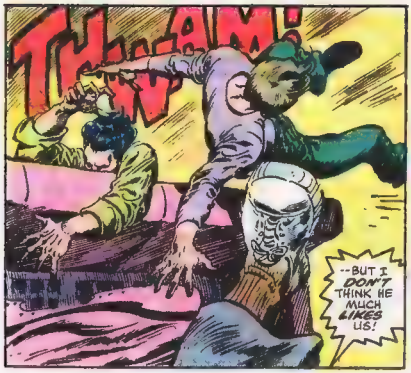
"AND PERHAPS THIS SINGLE SHOW OF STRENGTH WOULD BE SUFFICIENT TO DISCOURAGE ALL BUT THE MOST FOOLHARDY OF THE SCAVENGERS...
YWIIII

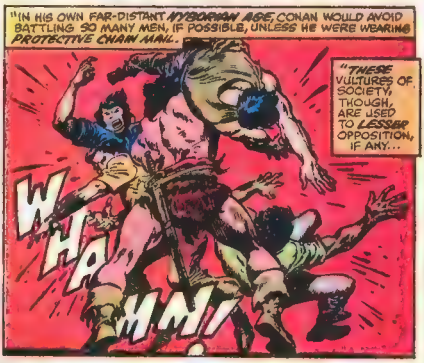
"YET, IN EVERY MOB, WHETHER IT SEEKS PLUNDER OR BLOOD, THERE IS ALWAYS THE MAN WHO GOES... TOO FAR.
HEY, WOW, MAN!
I CANNOT BELIEVE THAT THIS IS HAPPENING!

HEY, MAN, LOOK! I GOT ME A SWORD!
JUS' CALL ME DARTH VADER!
"THE YOUTH'S MIND, NEED IT BE SAID, IS A TRIFLE HAZY.

"DOUBTLESS, HE WILL NEVER KNOW HOW VERY FORTUNATE HE WILL BE, SOME HOURS HENCE TO FIND HIMSELF WAKING IN A HOSPITAL...
GNNGH!
"...RATHER THAN A MORGUE.

"BY NOW, CONAN'S MINISCULE STORE OF PATIENCE IS NEARLY EXHAUSTED...
OUT, JACKALS-- WHILE YOU STILL MAY!
I D-DON'T UNNERSTAND A WORD HE'S SAYIN'--





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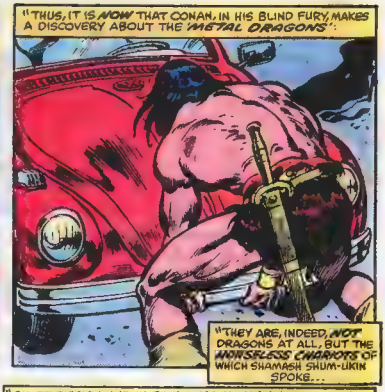
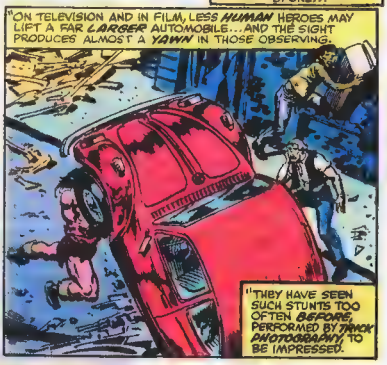
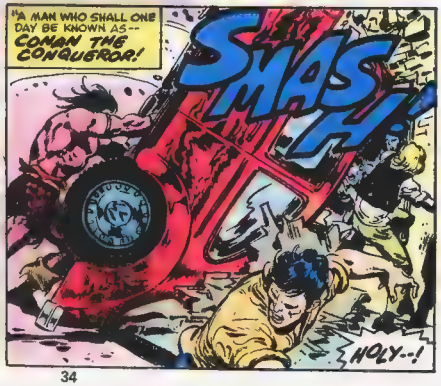
"MOREOVER, THERE ARE STILL BRIGANDS IN NEARBY BUILDINGS, WHO IN ANOTHER MOMENT MAY TURN THEIR MORBID ATTENTIONS TO THE ONE HE PROTECTS ON BEHALF OF THE RED-HAIR.


"THUS, IT IS NOW THAT CONAN, IN HIS BLIND FURY, MAKES A DISCOVERY ABOUT THE METAL DRAGONS":
"THEY ARE, INDEED, NOT DRAGONS AT ALL, BUT THE HORSELESS CHARIOTS OF WHICH SHAMASH SHUM-UKIN SPOKE...

"...ALBEIT TERRIFICALLY, MASSIVELY HEAVY ONES--EVEN THE SMALLEST OF THEM!
:UNNNH--!:


"ON TELEVISION AND IN FILM, LESS HUMAN HEROES MAY LIFT A FAR LARGER AUTOMOBILE...AND THE SIGHT PRODUCES ALMOST A YAWN IN THOSE OBSERVING.
"THEY HAVE SEEN SUCH STUNTS TOO OFTEN BEFORE, PERFORMED BY TRICK PHOTOGRAPHY, TO BE IMPRESSED.

"HERE, HOWEVER, THERE ARE NO INGENIOUS CAMERA ANGLES...NO CARDBOARD CUT-OUTS OR PAPIER-MACHE MODELS OR HIDDEN ELECTRO-MAGNETS.
"HERE, THERE IS ONLY A MAN--A PERFECTLY-DEVELOPED PHYSICAL SPECIMEN, PERHAPS THE MIGHTIEST WARRIOR OF HIS OWN OR ANY OTHER AGE--


"A MAN WHO SHALL ONE DAY BE KNOWN AS--CONAN THE CONQUEROR!
SMASH!
HOLY--!

"THIS *SECOND* DEMONSTRATION IS ADEQUATE TO CLEAR THE *ENTIRE BLOCK* BOTH OF LOOTERS...AND OF CASUAL *ONLOOKERS*.

TH-THANK YOU, CONAN--FOR NOT USING YOUR *SWORD* ON ANYONE!

THIS CITY HAS SEEN *ENOUGH* VIOLENCE--*TOO MUCH*--!

CROM'S DEVILS! THIS PLACE MAKES *ARENJUN, CITY OF THIEVES*, SEEM AS PEACEFUL AS A *TEMPLE OF MITRA!*

I... DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU *SAVED*, CONAN...

BUT YOU'RE PROBABLY *RIGHT*.

"*ALL NIGHT*, AND EVEN INTO THE *BROAD DAYLIGHT* TO COME, THE REIGN OF ANARCHISTIC TERROR WILL *CONTINUE*:

"*ARSONISTS*, THOSE SKULKING HYENAS THAT SPIT FIRE, WILL BE AS BUSY IN THEIR OWN WAY AS THE *LOOTERS*...

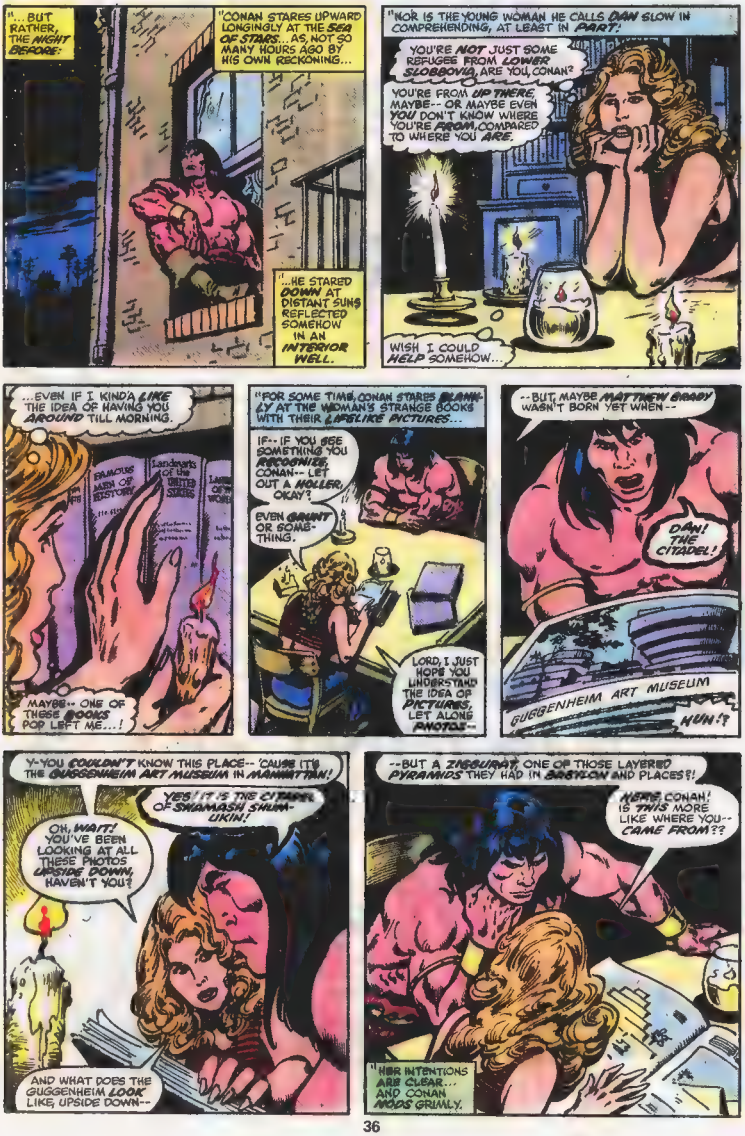
"...AND MOST OF THOSE *HARDEST HIT* BY EITHER WILL BE THOSE UNFORTUNATE SOULS WHO SHARE THE SAME *NEIGHBORHOOD* AND *SUBWAY STOP* AND, YES, *RACE* AS THOSE WHO PLUNDER THEM.

"POLICE AND FIREMEN WILL BE UNABLE FULLY TO *COPE*... BUT, LET IT BE SAID THAT THEY AT LEAST SHALL ADD BUT *LITTLE* TO THE UNLEASHED *VIOLENCE* OF THE HOUR.

"IF THE SITUATION BRINGS OUT THE *WORST* IN MANY PEOPLE, IT WILL BRING OUT THE *BEST* IN OTHERS--

"--AS THEY HELP *SWEET TRAFFIC*, OR PERFORM MORE *VITAL* SERVICES OTHERWISE UNAVAILABLE IN THE STRICKEN METROPOLIS

"IT IS *NOT* THE EVENTS OF THE DAYLIGHT HOURS, HOWEVER, WHICH HERE CONCERN *US*...


"... BUT RATHER, THE NIGHT BEFORE:
"CONAN STARES UPWARD LONGINGLY AT THE SEA OF STARS... AS, NOT SO MANY HOURS AGO BY HIS OWN RECKONING...
"...HE STARED DOWN AT DISTANT SUNS REFLECTED SOMEHOW IN AN INTERIOR WELL.
"NOR IS THE YOUNG WOMAN HE CALLS DAN SLOW IN COMPREHENDING, AT LEAST IN PART:
YOU'RE NOT JUST SOME REFUGEE FROM LOWER SLOBBOVIA, ARE YOU, CONAN?
YOU'RE FROM UP THERE, MAYBE-- OR MAYBE EVEN YOU DON'T KNOW WHERE YOU'RE FROM, COMPARED TO WHERE YOU ARE.
WISH I COULD HELP SOMEHOW...
...EVEN IF I KINDA LIKE THE IDEA OF HAVING YOU BROOD TILL MORNING.
FAMOUS MEN OF HISTORY
Landmarks of the UNITED STATES
MAYBE-- ONE OF THESE BOOKS POP LEFT ME...!
"FOR SOME TIME, CONAN STARES BLANKLY AT THE WOMAN'S STRANGE BOOKS WITH THEIR LIFELIKE PICTURES...
IF-- IF YOU SEE SOMETHING YOU RECOGNIZE, CONAN-- LET OUT A HOLLER, OKAY?
EVEN GRUNT OR SOMETHING.
LORD, I JUST HOPE YOU UNDERSTAND THE IDEA OF PICTURES, LET ALONE PHOTOS--
--BUT, MAYBE MATTHEW BRADY WASN'T BORN YET WHEN--
DAN! THE CITADEL!
GUGGENHEIM ART MUSEUM
HUH!?
Y-YOU COULDN'T KNOW THIS PLACE-- 'CAUSE IT'S THE GUGGENHEIM ART MUSEUM IN MANHATTAN!
YES! IT'S THE CITADEL OF SHAMASH SHUMUKIN!
OH, WAIT! YOU'VE BEEN LOOKING AT ALL THESE PHOTOS UPSIDE DOWN, HAVEN'T YOU?
AND WHAT DOES THE GUGGENHEIM LOOK LIKE, UPSIDE DOWN--
--BUT A ZIGGURAT, ONE OF THOSE LAYERED PYRAMIDS THEY HAD IN BABYLON AND PLACES?!
HERE, CONAN! IS THIS MORE LIKE WHERE YOU-- CAME FROM??
"HER INTENTIONS ARE CLEAR... AND CONAN MOPS GRIMLY.

"WITHIN MINUTES . .

WELL, I DON'T KNOW WHAT *GOOD* IT'LL DO, MY MAN-- BUT AS YOU'VE PROBABLY GUESSED, I'M *CHAUFFEURING* YOU TO THE *MUSEUM*.

MAYBE, SOME-HOW YOU'LL FIND THE *ANSWERS* YOU'RE LOOKING FOR THERE-- IF *ANYWHERE*!

"YET, ON *FIFTH AVENUE* ON MANHATTAN ISLAND, INSIDE THAT VERY *HOUSE OF ART*...

MAN, THIS IS OUR *LUCKY NIGHT*!

YEAH! WE PLAN A *NEAT* OF THE *GUGGENHEIM*--

--THE SAME NIGHT *MA NATURE* GIVES US A HELPIN' HAND WITH A *STORM* AND A *BLACKOUT*!

"AND, SOME TIME AFTER-WARD...

WELL, HERE WE *ARE*, CONAN-- AS IF YOU COULDN'T *TELL*!

THE SOLOMON R. GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

I KNOW, WE CAN'T GET *IN* THIS TIME OF NIGHT, BUT AT LEAST YOU CAN GET A *CLOSER LOOK* AT IT.

AND THEN *AGAIN*--!

THE DOOR'S *AJAR*! I DON'T *LIKE* IT, CONAN.

SOME-THINGS NOT *KOSHER*.

I KNOW WE SHOULDN'T HAVE COME *IN*, BUT-- *CHRISTOPHER ROBIN*!

IT'S-- A *MUSEUM GUARD*! HE'S BEEN *BRAINED*!

TH-THAT *BLOOD*! IS HE--?

KEEP *BACK*, DAN! LET *ME*--!

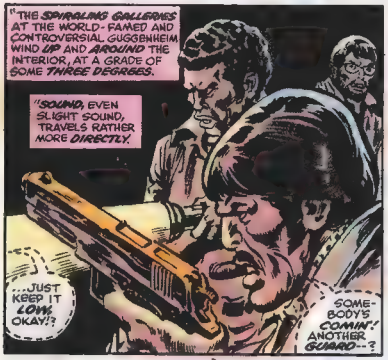
HE'S DEAD!

I'M-- AFRAID I GET YOUR *DRIFT*, CONAN.

AND, I CAN GUESS *WHO* KILLED HIM!

SO MAYBE W-WE BETTER KEEP OUR VOICES DOWN TO A DULL ROAR, DAG?
CROM...!
HMMM... WHOEVER'S PULLING THIS HEIST, THEY HAVEN'T HIT THE LOWER LEVEL YET.
WH-WHAT'S WRONG, CONAN? WHAT DO YOU--?

IF THIEVES WOULD LOOT THIS HOUSE OF RELICS, AS I LOOTED ONE IN NEMEDIA IN MY DAY...
...THEY'LL LOOK FAR, I THINK, TO FIND SOMETHING WORTH STEALING.
FROM YOUR TONE, I TAKE IT YOU'RE NOT EXACTLY SOLD ON MODERN ART, HUH?
JUST KEEP IT LOW, OKAY!?

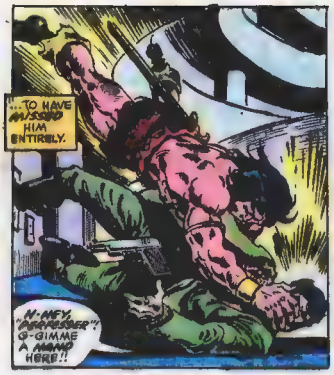

"THE SPIRALING GALLERIES AT THE WORLD-FAMED AND CONTROVERSIAL GUGGENHEIM WIND UP AND AROUND THE INTERIOR, AT A GRADE OF SOME THREE DEGREES.
"SOUND, EVEN SLIGHT SOUND, TRAVELS RATHER MORE DIRECTLY.
...JUST KEEP IT LOW, OKAY!?
SOMEBODY'S COMIN'! ANOTHER GUARD--?

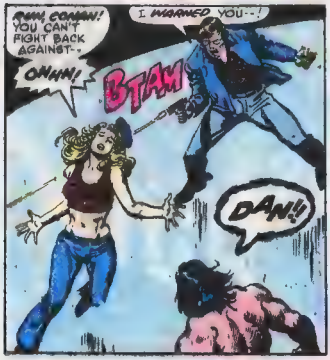
HEY! IT'S JUST A GUY AN' HIS BROAD!
BEHIND ME, DAN!
BUT--HOLY CRUD! HE'S PRACTICLY NAKED!
THERE'S SCANT HONOR AMONG THIEVES IN ANY AGE, I'D WAGER--AND THESE DOGS MAY NOT LIKE OUR BEING HERE!

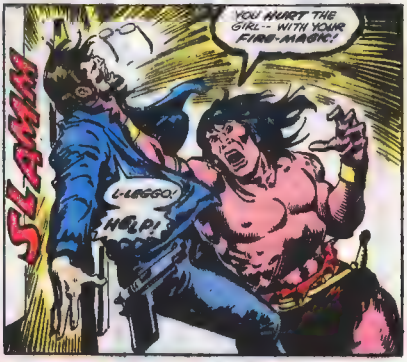
"THE BARBARIAN'S INSTINCTS ARE CHARACTERISTICALLY CORRECT...
HE AIN'T NO GUARD--JUST SOME KIND'A FLASHER!
HIM AN' THE DAME MUST'A SNEAKED IN HERE TA MAKE SOME WHOOPEE! I'LL--
BLAM!
BUTCH--DON'T! THE NOISE--!

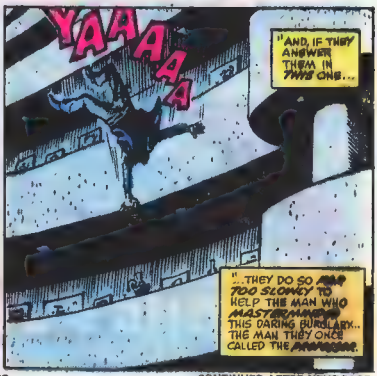
"CONAN'S REFLEXES, EVEN IN A STRANGE NEW WORLD, ARE SO SWIFT THAT HE NEARLY EVADES THE POINT-BLANK SHOT--
"ALMOST--BUT NOT QUITE.
UMMMH!

BLAM
YAAAH--!
"BETTER FOR THE ONE KNOWN AS BUTCH--



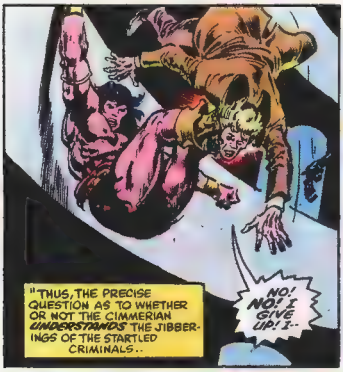


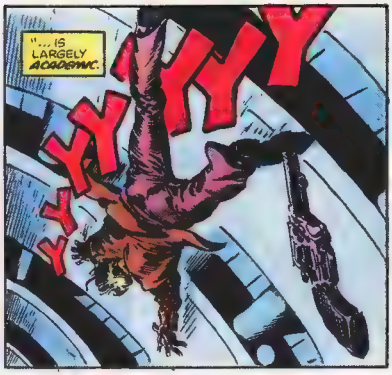




CONTINUED AFTER NEXT PAGE

"STILL, THERE ARE THREE OTHERS:
YMIR'S BLOOD!
BLAM
BLAMM
FOR THE GIRL'S SAKE, I'D HAVE LET YOU THIEVING DOGS LIVE--
--BUT NO LONGER!
AGGKK
PHUMP!
HOLY SPIT! YOU SEE THAT, ABE?
THAT GUY SKEWERED CHARLIE LIKE A-- LIKE A BUTTERFLY-- PINNED 'IM RIGHT TO A PAINTIN'!
FORGET CHARLIE-- HE'S HAD IT!
BLAAM
BLAMM
AND SO'LL WE--
--IF WE DON'T PUMP ROCKY HERE FULL OF LEAD!
"THE GREAT DOME OF THE GUGGENHEIM RISES NEARLY 100 FEET FROM THE FLOOR-- AND MORE THAN ONE ART ENTHUSIAST HAS EXPERIENCED VERTIGO MERELY BY LOOKING IN EITHER DIRECTION...
"YET, CONAN SCRAMBLES AGILELY ABOVE IT, HAND OVER HAND, AS IF IT WERE A POOL OF WATER FAR BELOW HIM--
"--RATHER THAN SOLID CONCRETE.
DAMN, BUT YOU'RE FAST!
WHO ARE YOU?
WHY'RE YOU--?
URRKK!!
IN CONAN'S EYES, HOWEVER, THESE LATTER-DAY BRIGANDS HAVE FORFEITED ALL RIGHT TO BARGAIN, OR EVEN PLEAD FOR MERCY...

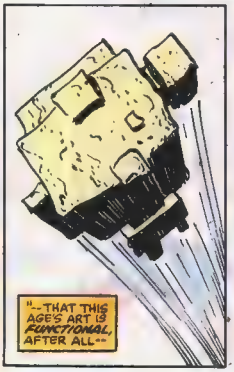

"THUS, THE PRECISE QUESTION AS TO WHETHER OR NOT THE CIMMERIAN UNDERSTANDS THE JIBBERINGS OF THE STARTLED CRIMINALS..
NO! NO! I GIVE UP! I--


"... IS LARGELY ACADEMIC.

"ONLY TWO ROBBERS NOW REMAIN ON THEIR FEET...
K-KEEP BACK!!
OH JEEZ-- IF ONLY I COULD S-SEE BETTER IN HERE--!
"AND SO, THE VERY DARKNESS WHICH OF LATE WAS THE BRIGANDS ACCOMPLICE--

"IS NOW BECOME THEIR HATED FOE!
"CONAN, HOWEVER, HAS NO SUCH PROBLEM AS THESE CIVILIZED SAVAGES.
HELP ME!
SOMEBODY HELP ME!!
"BUT NO ONE CAN.

"AND, IN HURLING A HEAVY PIECE OF MODERN SCULPTURE THAT MOST MEN COULD SCARCELY LIFT, THE BARBARIAN FINDS--
JUSTICE

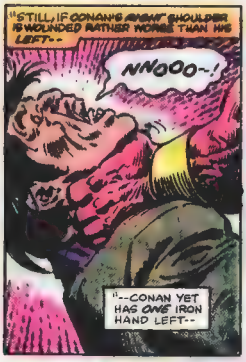

"--THAT THIS AGE'S ART IS FUNCTIONAL, AFTER ALL--

"--AS IT CRUSHES THE FLEEING MAN'S SKULL LIKE A HOLLOW, ROTTED EGGSHELL.
ARR-GH!

"YET, THE FIRST ROBBER TO FALL IS THE LAST TO REMAIN ALIVE...
M-MY GUN!
IF I CAN JUST--!

ALL RIGHT, YOU SON OF A--!

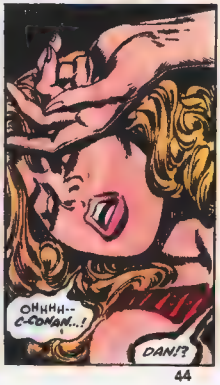
"PERHAPS IT IS HIS FEAR--OR THE OWN LIGHT--OR THE FACT THAT HE IS FIRING LEFT-HANDED--THAT CAUSES THE BRIGAND'S BULLET ONLY TO GRAZE THE CHARGING FIGURE--
BLAM!

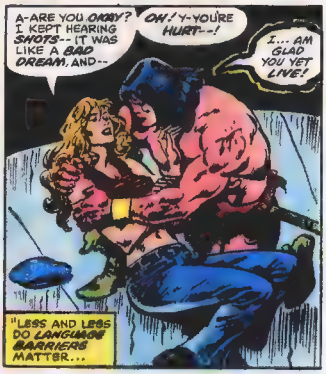

"STILL, IF CONAN'S RIGHT SHOULDER IS WOUNDED RATHER WORSE THAN HIS LEFT--
NNOOO--!
"--CONAN YET HAS ONE IRON HAND LEFT--

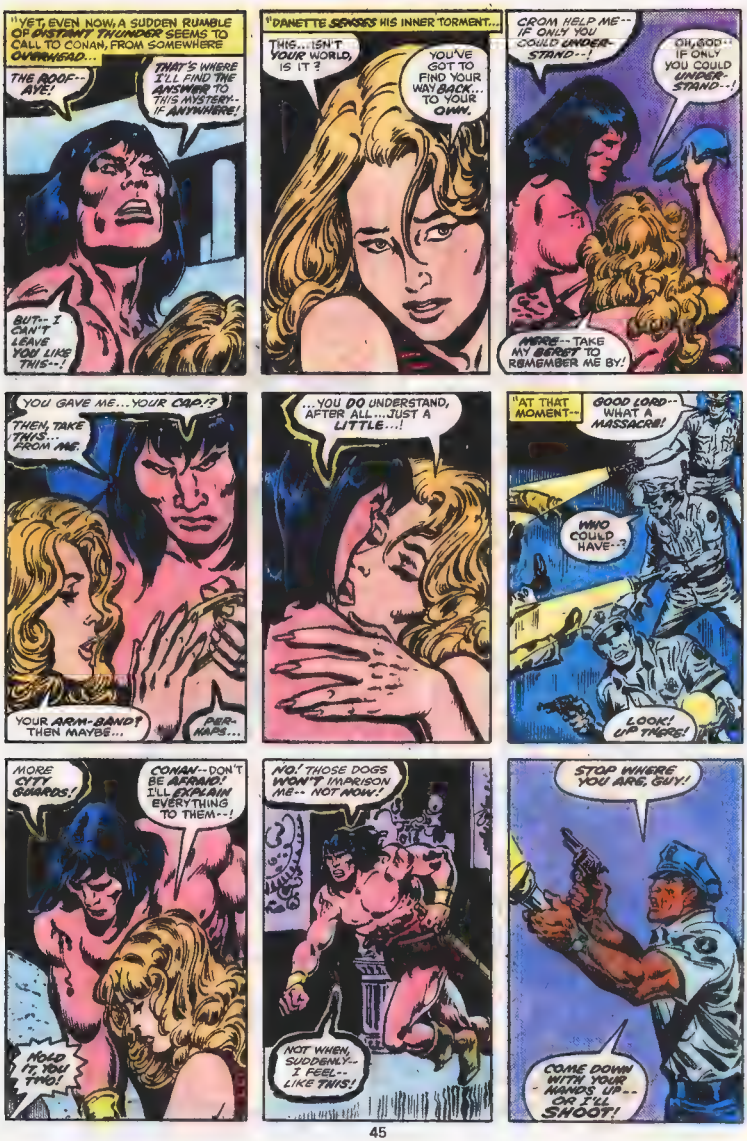
"AND THOUGH DESPERATE SPASMS SHAKE THE BRIGAND'S WRITHING BODY--

"--IT PROVES EASILY ENOUGH.

"A MAN OF A ROUGH-SHOD SON, CONAN WASTES NO EFFORT CONSIDERING THE RIGHT OR WRONGS OF WHAT HE HAS DONE.
"THEY TRIED TO KILL HIM AND THE GIRL; AND THEY DESERVED THEIR ENDS.


OHHHH--C-CONAN...!
DAN!?


A-ARE YOU OKAY? I KEPT HEARING SHOTS--IT WAS LIKE A BAD DREAM, AND--
OH! Y-YOU'RE HURT--!
I... AM GLAD YOU YET LIVE!
"LESS AND LESS DO LANGUAGE BARRIERS MATTER...


"YET, EVEN NOW, A SUDDEN RUMBLE OF DISTANT THUNDER SEEMS TO CALL TO CONAN, FROM SOMEWHERE OVERHEAD...
THE ROOF-- AYE!
THAT'S WHERE I'LL FIND THE ANSWER TO THIS MYSTERY-- IF ANYWHERE!
BUT-- I CAN'T LEAVE YOU LIKE THIS--!
"DANETTE SENSES HIS INNER TORMENT...
THIS...ISN'T YOUR WORLD, IS IT?
YOU'VE GOT TO FIND YOUR WAY BACK... TO YOUR OWN.
CROM HELP ME-- IF ONLY YOU COULD UNDER-STAND--!
OH, GOD-- IF ONLY YOU COULD UNDER-STAND--!
MORE-- TAKE MY BERET TO REMEMBER ME BY!
YOU GAVE ME...YOUR CAP!?
THEN, TAKE THIS... FROM ME.
YOUR ARM-BAND? THEN MAYBE...
PER-HAPS...
...YOU DO UNDERSTAND, AFTER ALL...JUST A LITTLE...!
"AT THAT MOMENT--
GOOD LORD-- WHAT A MASSACRE!
WHO COULD HAVE--?
LOOK! UP THERE!
MORE CITY GUARDS!
CONAN-- DON'T BE AFRAID! I'LL EXPLAIN EVERYTHING TO THEM--!
HOLD IT, YOU TWO!
NO! THOSE DOGS WON'T IMPRISON ME-- NOT NOW!
NOT WHEN, SUDDENLY-- I FEEL-- LIKE THIS!
STOP WHERE YOU ARE, GUY!
COME DOWN WITH YOUR HANDS UP-- OR I'LL SHOOT!

"ALREADY, HOWEVER, THE POLICEMEN ARE ALL BUT *FORGOTTEN* BY THE CIMMERIAN, AS HE FLEES UPWARD TO THE MUSEUM'S *ROOF*.

"HE FEELS *STRANGE*... AS IF HELL-BORN *SIRENS* CALL TO HIM, FROM WITHIN HIS OWN *HEAD*.

OKAY, BUDDY-- YOU *ASKED* FOR--

BAMM

:UNNNH!:

NO!

RUN, CONAN-- RUN!!

HOLD *ONTO* THIS HELLCAT, BRADY, WHILE I--

HEY! SHE'S BEEN *SHOT!*

AND HER BOYFRIEND'S GOT TO THE *ROOF!*

DAMN! HE COULD STAND OFF AN *ARMY* UP THERE, WITH THAT *SWORD* HE'S SPORTING!

"BUT, CONAN IS THINKING THIS MOMENT NOT OF *ARMIES*... OR EVEN OF THE *RED-HAIRED WOMAN* WHO SAVED HIS LIFE.

"HE SENSES *SOMETHING* IN THE VERY *AIR*...

"...SOMETHING HE'S *NOT* FELT SINCE, HOURS AGO, HE SUDDENLY PLUNGED INTO THE *WIZARD'S WELL*, AND ENTERED THIS STRANGE *EON*!

"ERE LONG, *BELOW*...

ALRIGHT, LADY-- SINCE WE *RECOGNIZED* ONE OF THOSE STIFFS INSIDE AS A *KNOWN HOOD*, WE WON'T *SHOOT*.

BUT, IF YOUR *BOYFRIEND* DOESN'T COME DOWN *SOON*, WE'RE GONNA HAVE TO GO UP *AFTER* HIM, EVEN IF--

SARGE! LOOK AT WHAT THAT CRAZY SONUVAGUN'S DOIN' *NOW!*

"*ONE* MOMENT, CONAN-- FEELING A SUDDEN, IRRESISTIBLE *SURGING* WITHIN HIM-- HOLDS UP A *PROUD AND BLOODED SWORD*--

"--AS IF DEFYING THE VERY *ELEMENTS* WHICH SWIRL ABOUT HIM.

"THE NEXT"--AND HE IS BATHED WITHOUT WARNING IN BLINDING, WRITHING FIRE FROM HEAVEN!
FRYKH

"HE STANDS THERE AN INSTANT, POISED LIKE PROMETHEUS RAGING AGAINST UNJUST GODS--

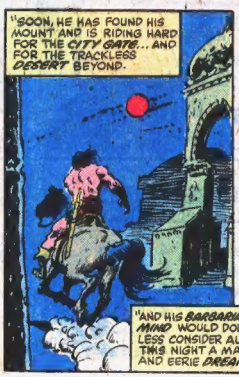
"--AND THEN IS SEEN NO MORE.

LORD! THAT FREAK THUNDERBOLT REALLY BLEW HIM TO SMITHEREENS!
YES, I GUESS... THAT'S WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE, DOESN'T IT?
YOU GOT ANOTHER EXPLANATION, LADY?
NO...NOT REALLY.
WHO WAS THAT CHARACTER, ANYWAY?

JUST... A GUY.
HE WASN'T FROM... AROUND HERE...!

"AND, IN ARGHTANA, ON A PLANET WHICH BOTH IS AND IS NOT THE ONE HE JUST LEFT--
"--CONAN REAPPEARS AMID A CRACKLING BURST OF FLAME--OUTSIDE THE ZIGGURAT OF SHAMASH SHUM-UKIN.

"AS TO WHY HE HAS MATERIALIZED HERE, RATHER THAN INSIDE, CONAN WILL LEAVE THAT TO SCHOLARS TO DEBATE.
"HE IS A SWORDSMAN, NOT A SORCERER.


"SOON, HE HAS FOUND HIS MOUNT AND IS RIDING HARD FOR THE CITY GATE... AND FOR THE TRACKLESS DESERT BEYOND.
"AND HIS BARBARIAN MIND WOULD DOUBTLESS CONSIDER ALL THIS NIGHT A MAD AND EERIE DREAM...

"...BUT THAT, DEEP INSIDE HIS SOUL... HE KNOWS BETTER.
"AS DO I... FOR I AM THE WATCHER!"
FIN

BULLPEN BULLETINS

STAN'S SOAPBOX

Okay, here it is. For once I remembered what I promised to write about last issue! Here's where you get a serious opinion as to the real difference in editorial approach between our competitors and Marvel. There have been more letters asking me to discuss this subject than any other (and I'd hate to find out that' they're all from the competish 'cause they wanna know how we do it)!

Basically, it seems to me that we write about people while they write about things. We're concerned with the psychological problems and urges that motivate our characters, while the other company prefers to dwell on what happened, how did it happen, and how do we catch the bad guy? Perhaps another way of saying it is, we write for the older reader, for those who are interested in true-to-life dialogue, in absorbing sub-plots and secondary story lines, and in provocative, imaginative themes to boggle the mind. We like to flavor our yarns with satire, with offbeat philosophical concepts, and with controversial subjects. On the other hand, our competitors' mags are aimed at a younger market, which is the reason their stories are generally simpler and more basic in approach.

Now then, I don't mean to sound smug and self-satisfied. I've been telling you the type of stories we aim for, but I'm not claiming a bullseye each time around. As all true believers know, we've certainly come up with our own share of clinkers, of stories that could have been and should have been better. But when we manage to get our act together, we sure come up with some winners!

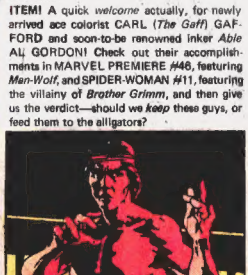
And now I'll turn you loose while I start to research next month's column. As previously promised, I'm gonna give you the top-secret lowdown on the monumental mystery behind Honest Irving Forbush! Is he man or myth? Is he talent or turkey? Is he bigger than a breadbox? All this and more shall be fearlessly revealed when we meet again next issue! Till then, remember—audentes fortuna juvat!

Excelsior!

Stan

ITEM! It was one of those days—a desperately-late SPIDER-WOMAN cover was lost, the stat machine was broken, the water pipes were frozen (in August, yet!) and the paychecks were late. In fact, things were so bad that editor ROGER (*Sterno*) STERN was seen standing on the 6th story window ledge, reading his last will and testament aloud. Just after he had bequeathed away his INCREDIBLE HULK t-shirt to assistant editor *Masterful* MARK GRUENWALD, the news came that once again, Mighty MARVEL COMICS had captured the lion's share of the prestigious EAGLE AWARDS, British fandom's highest honor. Among the winners were X-MEN, for best team *and* favorite dramatic series; SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN, for favorite Black-and-White magazine; HOWARD THE DUCK, for favorite humor series; JOHN CARTER, WARLORD OF MARS, for favorite new series; AVENGERS ANNUAL *#7*, "The Final Threat", for favorite single-issue story; and (oddly enough) that *same* story, and its *sequel* in MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE ANNUAL *#2*, "Death Watch", for favorite continued story. Also honored were *Timerous* TERRY AUSTIN, as favorite inker; *Thanos*, as favorite villain; *Pip the Troll*, as favorite supporting character; and *The Silver Surfer*, as character most worthy of his own feature. That delightful news perked up just about everyone around the office, *especially* Roger Stern, proud editor of both JOHN CARTER and X-MEN. Good ol' Rog stepped down off the window sill and headed for his desk, happy as a clam! Mark was somewhat disappointed, however, at not getting his promised t-shirt, but we'll all chip in and buy him one—*if* the paychecks ever come!

ITEM! A quick *welcome* actually, for newly arrived ace colorist CARL (*The Gaff*) GAFFORD and soon-to-be renowned inker *Able* AL GORDON! Check out their accomplishments in MARVEL PREMIERE *#46*, featuring *Man-Wolf*, and SPIDER-WOMAN *#11*, featuring the villainy of *Brother Grimm*, and then give us the verdict—should we *keep* these guys, or feed them to the alligators?



ITEM! A couple of years back a trio of talented gentlemen named Doug Moench, Paul Gulacy, and Dan Adkins combined their skills to bring the MASTER OF KUNG FU series to a breathtaking pinnacle of achievement in comics art. When, finally, circumstances separated this award-winning team, it seemed that things would never be quite right with *Shang-Chi* again. For a while, each succeeding issue brought new problems, artist and inker changes, natural disasters, plagues of locusts, and all the accompanying schedule ills which disturb the delicate balance of yin and yang necessary to produce Timeless Masterpieces. Undaunted, however, mighty Marvel pressed on, and, at long last recruited *Miraculous* MIKE ZECK, penciler, and *Brash* BRUCE PATTERSON, inker, to join *Devil-May-Care* DOUG MOENCH, writer, as regulars on MOKF. As each new issue rolls in from these talented and dedicated gentlemen, the feeling grows among those of us at 575 Madison that we are witnessing the evolution of a series destined to rival—nay, *surpass* the classics of yesteryear. We *could* try to describe the way Mike's dynamic-yet-subtle penciling is complemented perfectly by Bruce's clean, bold, striking inkline, or how well the sheer lyrical *power* of the art blends with both Doug's oft-acclaimed scripting and Shang-Chi's unique personality, but we won't. Instead, we simply *defy* Marveldom Assembled to read issue *#73* of MOKF, now on sale, which chronicles Shang-Chi's return to dreaded *Mordillo's Island*! You'll see!

ITEM! Gigantic Editor-in-Chief JIM SHOOTER answered the phone the other day, and who should be on the line but JOHN BELUSHI, star of stage, screen and NBC's comedy hit, SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE! Ever calm under pressure, Jim smoothly said, "Hey, John, you're fine. How am I?" But Jaunty John understood anyway, and proceeded to congratulate the Marvel crew for our creative efforts on MARVEL TEAM-UP *#74*, which featured Mr. Belushi and the other wild and crazy members of the *Not-Ready-For-Prime-Time Players* (*shame* on you if you missed it!). Later, John stopped by the hallowed halls to meet all the awestruck armadillos, especially Chris Claremont, Bob Hall, Dave Cockrum, and Marie Severin, who crafted the issue in question; and to invite us to the Opening Night party for his new movie, *Animal House*. It was an honor, a pleasure, and a night to remember for us Bullpenners. By the way, be sure to see the flick, it's the cat's pajamas!

ITEM! So many great things are happening we can't begin to cover them all, but pay attention and we'll try to zip through some of them quickly. First, be *sure* to catch S³ECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN *#27* which showcases the penciling of one of the most rapidly rising stars this industry has ever seen, namely FRANK MILLER. Lanky Frank's portrayal of the web-slinger's characteristic spider-like movement as he traverses the rooftops is sure to become *a standard* for spider-artists. And wait'll you see what he does with a certain Fearless *guest-star*! After *that*, check out MS. MARVEL *#22* and get in on the ground floor of what promises to be a *super* series of issues drawn by *Meticulous* MIKE VOSBURG. And, you'd be well advised to seek out current issues of both THE HULK and CAPTAIN AMERICA, between the pages of which rage the most memorable *crossover* of recent history. And as if *that* weren't enough, HOWARD THE DUCK is alive and well, and don't let anyone tell you different. Get down to your newsstand *now*, and you won't miss out! Okay? *Okay*!

WHY NOT?

c/o MARVEL COMICS GROUP
575 Madison Avenue
New York, New York 10022

ROY THOMAS
EDITOR
MARK GRUENWALD
ASSISTANT EDITOR

NOSTALGIC NOTE: As we predicted, WHAT IF #11 ("What If the Original Marvel Bullpen Had Become the Fantastic Four?") garnered a trainload of mail, commenting on Jack Kirby's first-and-only artwork on the F.F. in eight years! Here's a random sampling of those mostly laudatory missives. . .!

Congratulations! WHAT IF #11 was *numero uno* on my list! I enjoyed seeing Jolly Jack Kirby with his pulse-pounding pencils and remarkable writing working on an F.F.-based story. Stan the Man and the rest of the original Bullpen couldn't have been in better form— although I did think the note the Skrulls sent attached to the cosmic ray box was a bit corny. The "S" people? Now really! Still, the idea of WHAT IF #11 will be a milestone in Marvel history. Let's see more of this idea!

Ted Coletti
3780 Willett Ave.
Bronx, NY 10467

WHAT IF #11 was. . . well. . . entertaining. It was a good idea, but you just didn't put in enough of that old Marvel Magic. I did, however, love the way you characterized Jack "Thing" Kirby and Flo Steinberg. Though I've never liked Kirby's art, I was glad he did this issue. You see, I believe that in WHAT IF, when you do a story, you should have the artist who is more famous for the featured character(s) do the art.

Peter Brown
(No Address Given)

WHAT IF #11 is the most original comic-book Marvel has ever produced!

Nelson C.
(No Address Given)

I have to admit that when I first heard about the story, I was really skeptical about the whole idea. But I was pleasantly surprised. I really enjoyed WHAT IF #11.

Wayneard
R. 2, Box 210
Wartburg, TN 37887

The story and artwork on WHAT IF #11 were the best I have seen from Jack Kirby since his old days as artist on THE FANTASTIC FOUR. I'm only sorry Joe Sinnott couldn't have inked it.

Freddie Fligo
(No Address Given)

I have just finished what I consider an average comic: WHAT IF #11. It was only average because of the storyline, which was neither realistic nor like a Marvel Comic. The main thing that has kept Marvel in the #1 spot in comicdom is the realism put forth in what was considered years ago a "funny book."

T. Towers
Harrisburg, PA

WHAT IF #11 was entirely magnificent. Mike Royer's inking was much better than usual, and that "Thing" really looked like Jack. Flo "Invisible Girl" Steinberg's constant whimpering was a total jest upon the formerly immature Sue Storm. I'm just surprised Flo didn't keep repeating, "If only Stan were here, *he'd* know what to do!" The story was excellent, and the Sub-Mariner tie-in was superb.

Andy Stoesen
677 Candlewood Dr.
Greensboro, NY 27403

How about a sequel?

Scott Phillips
6319 Driscoll Ave.
Albuquerque, NM 87109

WHAT IF #11 was one of the most confusing WHAT IFs to date. Unlike most issues where I could see exactly where the Marvel Universe veered off on an alternate path, I could not here. Was it at the point where Reed Richards and crew did *not* go up in the rocket to become the F.F.? Did they get killed when the rocket crashed to Earth? Or did they never exist at all? Then, I figured that maybe the tale never stemmed from Marvel-Earth at all, maybe from our real world. But then how did Subby and the Skrulls get there? I must admit I was fully expecting to see Sub-Mariner turn out to be someone in the Bullpen, too (maybe Bill Everett or Roy)!

Gene Entwender
Racine, WI

Whew! I just put down WHAT IF #11, and let me tell you, it was great! It was the best WHAT IF story you guys have ever done, even though it was a little corny. Too bad you can't get Jack as a regular on WHAT IF— or THE FANTASTIC FOUR! And when is the Bullpen getting its own book?

Chuck Yeaman
1769 Michon Dr.
San Jose, CA 95124

WHAT IF. . . Stan Lee hadn't written WHAT IF #11? Ah yes, what if? But he didn't, so he can't be blamed if the story turns out crummy. Hold it— I didn't say the story was crummy. It wasn't excellent, either— but the concept was great!

Ace Gary
Flushing, NY

Dear Jack— It's kind of sad to admit, but I've done you a grave injustice. I thought you were incapable of writing. I should have realized that there's a difference between what appeals to people and what good writing is. WHAT IF #11 was excellent, and I see now that just because MR. MACHINE, BLACK PANTHER, etc., don't appeal to me, they are *not* examples of poor writing. What did I like about WHAT IF #11? *Everything*!

Bruce Weintraub
68-36 108th St.
Forest Hills, NY 11375

THE MICRONAUTS ARE COMING!

by Mantlo & Golden

Next Issue:
WHAT IF~Sgt. FURY fought World War II in SPACE?

--PLUS THE ENIGMATIC TIME TRAVELLER BATTLE THE EVIL BARON KARZA IN AN ALL-NEW SPACE-SPANNING ADVENTURE SERIES BY.. BILL MANTLO · MICHAEL GOLDEN · JOSEF RUBENSTEIN